VENDING STANDS

FOR THE

VISUALLY HANDICAPPED

Commonwealth of Pennsylvania
Department of Welfare
State Council for the Blind
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Efforts have been made in recent years to enlarge the previously restricted range of occupations which can be successfully performed by blind persons. One occupation which has received considerable impetus within the last ten years is that of vending stands. This field has proved most beneficial to a selected and qualified group of visually handicapped persons, vitally in need of suitable employment giving adequate financial returns to themselves and dependents. With the development of this type of employment there has come to the blind a realization of the possibility of economic security.

Those not actually engaged in the rehabilitation of the blind may ask, "What do you mean by a vending stand?" The small business, operating in the lobby of a Court House, a Post Office, or an office building, selling magazines, newspapers, tobacco products, candy, and in some instances, soft drinks and ice cream, is considered a vending stand. Naturally, the location of the stand and the needs of the patrons more or less control the type of merchandise carried and sold. In some of the vending stands, particularly those in factory buildings, coffee and sandwiches are handled in addition to the regular stock items.

Since 1934, the State Council for the Blind has undertaken, with limited personnel and inadequate funds, to devote some of its efforts to the placement of visually handicapped persons in vending stands. During these years the program has developed along the following line: superintendents of factories, managers of office buildings, and officials of public buildings are contacted and the plan presented. Where the management of a building is agreeable to granting a space, rental free for a stand, the grant is made to the Pennsylvania State Council for the Blind, for the rehabilitation of a blind person. In the event the selected blind person later desires to relinquish the privilege or does not prove satisfactory, the opportunity is then open for another blind operator.

Following the grant of a space for a vending stand, the licensor and the Council representative agree upon the general arrangement of equipment and the type of stock and

merchandise to be handled. At this point, the company granting the vending privilege is relieved of any financial burden which the stand may incur, although in many instances the firm or company offering the space, also supplies the main structure, especially when the stand is located directly in a factory or plant.

With the installation of equipment and stock, the operator is then trained in conducting the business, namely, serving customers, merchandising and keeping financial accounts. A Council representative makes regular supervisory visits to the operator and contacts the persons in authority in charge of the plant or building. In some instances, where problems and difficulties arise, the licensor is hesitant to register complaints with the blind operator but is willing to explain matters to the representative or supervisor. By this plan many matters can be corrected with very little difficulty.

Vending Stand located in the lobby of the Fayette County Court House, Uniontown, Pennsylvania

A well regulated vending stand with an efficient operator serves a dual-purpose, bringing results to both the operator and the grantor of the vending stand permit. In one of the larger cities in our State, a hospital stand has served its patrons so efficiently that another hospital in the same city has asked for the same type service from the Council. Unfortunately, there has as yet been no suitable space available in this second hospital, but the Board of Managers is still eager to have the service. In another case, a factory which had been having trouble with the workmen leaving the plant during working hours to patronize a saloon, solved this problem by means of a stand operating eighteen hours a day, inside the plant. At the same time a blind person was given the opportunity of earning a good livelihood.

Vending stands in Court Houses and office buildings also eliminate the loss of time by employees, for with a stand in

Vending Stand located in the North Office Building of the State Capitol, Harrisburg, Pennsylvania

the building lobby, small purchases, such as candy and cigarettes can be made without leaving the building.

As in any business venture, there must be a need for the service. The main objective of the vending stand is to search out the possibilities and give an eligible blind person the opportunity of meeting this need. Experience has shown that to justify the expenditure of funds in establishing a vending stand, there should be two hundred or more prospective patrons. Most of the funds used in setting up the stands now in operation were secured from private organizations; in some instances the operator was able to secure a loan or had limited personal funds at his disposal. The lack of sufficient funds has been a handicap to securing suitable equipment.

The fact that many have become economically independent by operating stands is stimulating to other blind persons, a

Vending Stand located in the lobby of the Harrisburg Hospital, Harrisburg, Pennsylvania

number of whom are eagerly awaiting an opportunity to get launched in this work.

A young man, placed as the operator of a vending stand in the lobby of a general hospital, after three months voluntarily relinquished all public aid which loss of vision had forced him to accept for himself and his family. He now carries hospitalization insurance for the whole family and is contemplating the purchase of a home. The operation of his stand is most efficient and interesting. A complete price list of articles is placed in every room in the hospital and all that is necessary for the patient to do is to telephone the stand, whereupon, the article is delivered to the room. Patients may rent portable radios from the stand or place orders for flowers. Not only the patients, but the physicians and nurses of the hospital as well, are regular customers of this stand.

Another young man, blinded in youth as the result of an accident, is operating a vending stand in one of the steel mills

Vending Stand located in the factory of the Hazard Wire Rope Company, Wilkes-Barre, Pennsylvania

in our State. The company granting this vending stand permit has been most cooperative. In the first place they granted space in a small room with an open-counter arrangement facing into the mill. After several years, when changes were made in the factory building, an additional room was constructed especially to meet the needs of the vending stand. Previous to the placement of this operator, he had endeavored to sell insurance, but because of the uncertainty of his earnings, he concluded that he must find more secure employment. During the four years that he has operated this concession, he has given financial assistance to his mother and family, and has married and is now buying a home of his own.

Operating vending stands is an occupation that is open to blind women as well as men. One of the Post Office stands in our State is operated very efficiently by a girl who, prior to her loss of vision, had been a sales lady in a department store. As a result of her interest, her pleasing personality and her business acumen, the business of this stand has doubled since she has been placed as the operator.

On January 1, 1941, the State Council for the Blind had under its supervision, forty stands located in various cities and towns over the State. Although this number may seem small, yet, when you consider forty enterprises, employing twenty-six persons, totally blind, and fourteen persons with less than 10% vision, it is no small accomplishment.

The figures presented below are the actual net earnings to the operator after all expenses have been deducted, including in some cases the replacement or purchase of new equipment by the operator himself.

Type of Vending Stands	Number Employed	Total Number of Operating Months	Total Net Profit
Outside Locations	4	48	$2,582.92
Federal Buildings	11	143	11,401.09
Factory Locations	12	130	10,218.63
State Capitol Buildings	5	52	8,673.48
Office Buildings	3	36	773.27
Court House Lobbies	5	54	2,755.19
Hospitals	2	24	2,491.85
Park—Summer	1	4	305.44
Total	43	491	$39,201.87

Average net monthly earning to operator $79.83
Average net monthly earnings to operators in the following type of stands:

Outside Stands	$53.81	per month
Federal Stands	79.73	" "
Factory Stands	78.60	" "
State Building Stands	166.79	" "
Office Building Stands	21.48	" "
Court House Stands	51.02	" "
Park Stand	76.36	" "
Hospital Stands	103.83	" "

The following report shows the number of operators working during the year, 1940. Although there were only forty stands in operation at the beginning of January 1, 1941, there had been replacements of stand operators and new stands opened during the year, 1940.

Number of Operators		
3	Operators earned for the year 1940.	$2,000 and over
4	Operators earned for the year 1940.	1,200 to $2,000
17	Operators earned for the year 1940.	600 to 1,200
8	Operators earned for the year 1940.	400 to 600
12	Operators earned for the year 1940.	400 or less